

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT ALBANY
1400 WASHINGTON AVENUE
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12222



DEPARTMENT OF
ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE

19 June 1974

Dr. Oscar C. Blomgren
President, Inter-Probe, Inc.
1539 Morrow Avenue
North Chicago, Illinois 60064

Dear Dr. Blomgren:

In the letter I recently received from my good friend, A. D. Moore, I was fascinated to read of your eye-witness observations of the tornado and the ball lightning that was associated with it. As you may know, ball lightning observations are extremely rare, particularly those made by competent people with a sound technical background. In my opinion, it is, therefore, of considerable importance that your observations become a matter of record in the scientific literature.

Although I would urge you to prepare a written account suitable for publication, I realize that this may make more demands upon your time and energy than is possible for you to give. If this is the case, I wonder if you would be willing to dictate into a tape recorder what you saw and to send it to me. I would be happy to prepare a scientific communication on the basis of this and to send it to you for your approval and then, assuming you agree, to submit it for publication. If there are others who are available who would be willing to record their observations in addition, this too, of course, would be most valuable.

I hope you will be willing to make your observations available to the scientific community, for in my opinion they are of great value. If you are unable to do this, this matter is of sufficient importance that I shall plan, if you agree, to stop by in Chicago and to attempt to reconstruct what took place.

Sincerely yours,

Bernard Vonnegut

BV:smp
cc: Professor A. D. Moore



1539 Morrow Avenue, North Chicago, Illinois 60064, Area Code 312 689-4538

August 13, 1974

Dr. Bernard Vonnegut
State University of New York at Albany
Department of Atmospheric Sciences
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12222

Dear Dr. Vonnegut:

I wish to thank you for your letter of June 19th resulting from your conversation with our mutual friend, Professor A. D. Moore.

When I was a small boy, I think the year was 1912, I stood in the garden with my father watching a line of tornadoes passing near our rural downstate home. They were far enough away so that my reaction was fascination rather than fear, and I grew old craving the opportunity to see one of these monsters close up.

On August 15th, 1972 I at last had the opportunity of observing a tornado, and while it was indeed interesting, I have no desire to do it again.

Shortly after 5:00 P.M. on August 15th some of our people were standing in our office waiting for a rain coming from a dark, ominous sky to pass so they could go home. The storm was coming from the southwest. The rain was moderate. Among those waiting was my wife.

Our plant, located in a larger building some 50 feet to the south, was operating with a partial night shift of six employees, and I was working there. My wife was waiting to come to the plant.

The dark sky and rain had attracted me to the employees' entrance of the plant, where I was observing the storm through the open door.

Unknown to us, the storm contained a tornado. The tornado traveled along a line of trees bordering the western edge of the Lake Bluff, Illinois Community Golf Course (see Exhibit A) and touched down in a Navy house trailer parking area where the first circle and X are located. A number of trailers were destroyed. The funnel then was reported to rise slightly, passing over permanent housing, touching down briefly where the second mark is located on the grounds of

the V.A. Hospital, where only slight damage was reported to outbuildings.

The funnel then crossed the intersection of Lewis Avenue and Downey Road (Illinois Route 137), where it came very close to the ground and deroofed and otherwise damaged five or six inhabited tri-level Navy housing units. Many new housing units, also tri-level and of wooden, cedar shingle type, were in various stages of construction immediately to the northeast of the inhabited housing that was damaged. This new construction is visible from both our office and loading dock and is approximately one unobstructed block away. The new construction was badly damaged.

As the funnel passed through the new construction and reached the north end of the huge old Navy drill hall it became visible to both my wife and me. The drill hall is approximately 40 feet tall, and the funnel was obscuring the top half of the building.

To my wife, viewing this from the reception office window, the funnel looked like dense, black smoke. She thought the drill hall might be on fire.

From my vantage point in the employees' entrance at the northwest corner of the plant I saw the same thing. At that point there was a high wind and a heavy rain was blowing horizontally towards the north. Debris was blowing horizontally towards the north.

I watched as the funnel passed across the north end of the drill hall, across the railway track and Spaulding Avenue in an easterly direction. The wall of the plant obscured my vision and I ran through the plant to the open shipping door at the south end of the building, arriving there just as the tornado began to approach the ground from the southeast. The bottom end of a funnel or the whirlwind below the funnel, which I think was about 20 feet in diameter, was lowering directly towards me and passed through the top of a large oak tree located 100 feet southeast of the loading dock. Heavy limbs were flying through the air, and facing the storm, I hurriedly retreated some twenty or twenty-five feet into the building. My view of the outside was now framed by the shipping door, which is 8 feet wide and 8 feet high. I recollect little noise and no lightning at this point.

A black, vertical shaft moved from east to west, practically touching the end of the cement loading dock. I recall no movement in the shaft, and my perhaps rattled judgment tells me it took several seconds to pass the 8 feet wide doorway. Later we found that a previously burglarized and very heavy safe that was on the loading dock awaiting pickup by the junk man was spun around, and that the large steel dumpster container beside the dock was crushed.

With the black shaft centered on the doorway I was absolutely astounded to see a yellow ball approximately four feet in diameter come out of the black shaft onto the concrete shipping dock. It was centered in the doorway and looked like a large chrome yellow plastic ball filled with water, giving it an irregular circular shape, flattened on the bottom where it contacted the cement. It moved with a staggering motion in through the door towards me. It moved close to the paint room wall, and at the north end of the paint room wall it rolled past the end of a four tiered steel rack loaded with steel bar raw material. The bar ends seemed to push into it as it passed.

I retreated further, still watching as it rolled to the west wall of the plant, bumping the industrial fuse panel. It rolled over the welding table to the center of an east-west wall made of cinder block. I meanwhile had moved north through an opening in that wall and saw first a finger-like protrusion come through the wall to its north side about 18 inches above a wood bench. The whole ball formed on the north side of the wall and rolled over to the west side of the plant and north along the wall, over a stack of crating lumber. I was still backing north, parallel to its path. It rolled across a wooden trap door in the floor, pushed against two arms of a spot welding machine which distorted the ball, and continued moving north close to the wall until it rolled up onto a wood bench against the wall and 12 feet from the employees' door. At that point the ball disappeared through a glass, wire-filled window, and there was a great crash that was either lightning or simultaneous with lightning. Seconds later a huge lightning bolt came up (?) out of the pavement at the railroad crossing, destroying transformers, power lines and the crossing gates there. The thunder and lightning at this point were extremely violent, and the storm continued north to Kenosha, touching down a number of times.

Our building is an old one with hundreds of wire-filled glass windows mounted in steel frames, many of them cracked. After the event we noticed brown burned streaks on the inside of the windows in the area where the ball exited. They are rough to the touch and found in an area 4 feet by 2½ feet. None of us recall seeing those streaks before the event, but they could have been there before. They are still there.

Our internal electrical system was not damaged, but power was not restored until the second day following the storm. Golf balls were found between the two buildings.

I hope these observations may be of some interest to you.

Very truly yours,

INTER-PROBE



Oscar C. Blomgren
President

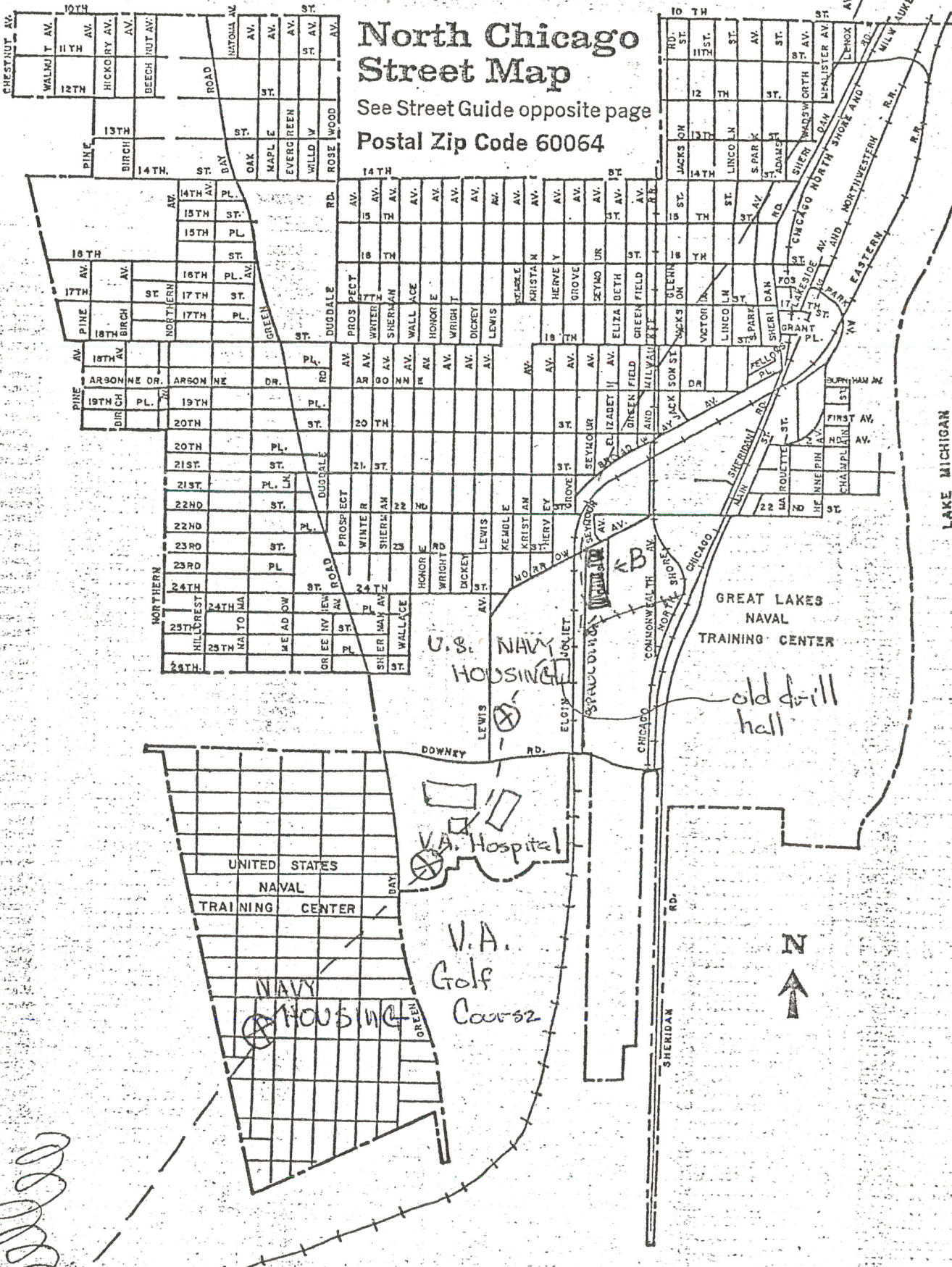
cc: Professor A. D. Moore

North Chicago Street Map

See Street Guide opposite page

Postal Zip Code 60064

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1



Handwritten scribble

old drill hall

LAKE BLUFF COMMUNITY GOLF COURSE



B



MORROW AVENUE

SPAULDING AVENUE

OFFICE

OFFICE

Employee's Entrance

Assembly Benches

Spot Welder

Lumber

Wood Bench

Cinder Block Wall

Welding Table

Power Panel

STEEL RACK

PAINT ROOM

LOADING DOCK

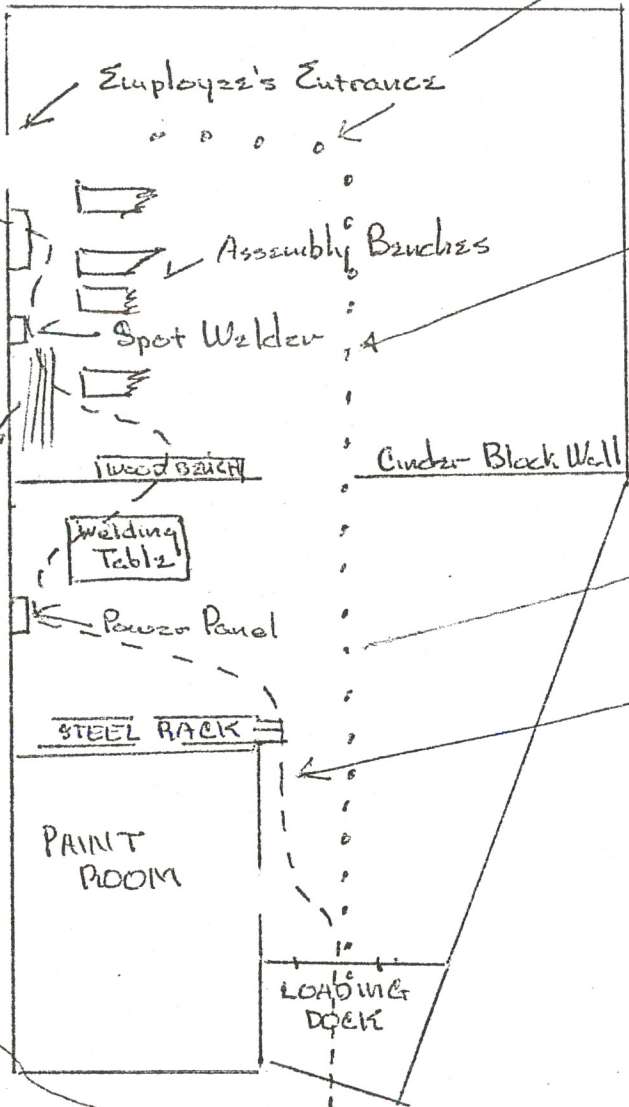
Observer's Position when ball exited. ②
100 ft. from ①

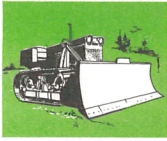
Observer's Path

Observer's Position when ball appeared ①

Path of ball
(Estimated time 30 sec.)

Path of founzel





TUXCO CORPORATION

AREA (312) 689-4340

NORTH CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60064



*Manufacturers of Hydroflotation Equipment, Engine Testing Equipment
and Seed Planter Test Stands.*

October 29, 1974

Dr. Bernard Vonnegut
State University of New York at Albany
Department of Atmospheric Sciences
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12222

Dear Dr. Vonnegut:

Enclosed you will find a letter from James E. Lechner.

This Navy Chief stayed with me through the whole time
that the lightning had struck.

Sincerely,

TUXCO CORPORATION

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Oscar C. Blomgren, Sr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Oscar C. Blomgren, Sr.

OCB,SR:jmd
Enclosure

Sept. 17

Dear Oscar,

Received your letter the other day. Will get this off by return mail.

We are now living in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The ship is now deployed in the Western Pacific. We are now in Kaoshiung, Formosa and leave early this morning for Subic Bay, P.I.

The letter to Mr. Bernard Vonnegut dated 13 August 1974 has been read by me and I concur.

If you should happen by Hawaii please feel free to drop in and see us.

James E. Lechner
838 Hays Circle
Halsey Terrace
Honolulu, Hawaii
96818

Respectfully,
James E. Lechner